

How Photography Reveals the Unseen: Absence as a Powerful Visual Force

By Harvey Shaw

Student name: Harvey Shaw

Student Number: 2307961

University Of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea

Module: independent project

Module code: ADAA6000

Course: Documentary Photography and visual activism.

Supervisor / Tutor: Paul Duerinckx

Word count: 6681 (total)

Character count: 42331

Title: How Photography Reveals the Unseen: Absence as a Powerful

Visual Force

Table of contents

List of Illustrations: Page 3

Abstract: Page 4

Introduction: Page 5

Chapter 1: Framing the unseen: Page 7

Chapter 2: The photograph as evidence: Page 20

Chapter 3: absent politics: Page 29

Conclusion: Page 38

References: Page 41

Bibliography: Page 43

List of illustrations: (in order)

Figure 1: Louis Daguerre, 1838, boulevard du temple

Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boulevard_du_Temple_%28photograph%29

Figure 2: Daido Moriyama, 1971, Dog and Man

Available: <https://aphelis.net/daido-moriyama-photographs/>

Figure 3: Harvey Shaw, 2026, Into The apex

Available: https://www.instagram.com/harvey_shaw_/

Figure 4: Alberto Ghizzi Panizza, 2014, Macro Photography

Available: <https://albertoghizzipanizza.com/en/categorie-gallerie/macro-en/>

Figure 5: Robert Capa, 1936, The Fallen Soldier

Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Falling_Soldier

Figure 6: Weegee, 1899, Crime scene photography

Available: [https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/new-york-city-by-weegee-](https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/new-york-city-by-weegee-the-famous/)

[the-famous/](https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/new-york-city-by-weegee-the-famous/)

Figure 7: Kevin Carter, 1993, vulture and the girl

Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vulture_and_the_Little_Girl

How Photography Reveals the Unseen: Absence as a Powerful Visual Force

Abstract

This Thesis investigates and explores photography and its ability to
hide just as much as it reveals, living in the absent, unseen and invisible

world. I will reference the theoretical contributions of artists and philosophers such as Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Ariella Azoulay, Geoffrey Batchen and Vilem Flusser. This thesis explores how the absence within imagery becomes a site where power operates throughout the silenced and the non-recognisable; to focus on the shadows casted behind the image and the meaning they hold.

Presence and time are central to human experience; they ground our social realities and shape collective memory. Photography captures and holds time, allowing individuals both to revisit their own histories and to encounter those of others. Yet the image often communicates more through what it withholds than through what it depicts. This thesis argues that our search for meaning frequently extends beyond the visible frame, reflecting a human impulse to find coherence, explanation, and connection within what cannot be immediately comprehended.

Introduction

How does photography represent the unseen and what makes absence
such a powerful visual tool?

Photography is often viewed as a tool of discovery and revelation however the real interests are the areas that are uncovered or consciously moved aside out of the viewer's gaze. Absence within photography is never neutral, it is defined by political, social and historical forces that determine who / what is represented and what disappears into the visual silence.

This thesis explores how absence and the unseen function as central elements of photographic practice. By analysing works ranging from Louis Daguerre's early daguerreotypes and Robert Capa's war imagery to Daido Moriyama's high contrast street photography and Alberto Ghizzi Panizza's macro studies, alongside examples from my own relevant practice, the research examines the ways photography captures fragments of reality while simultaneously hinting toward what is hidden or excluded.

Through the analysis of historic and contemporary examples this thesis will show how photography is something that sets perspective and history that demands viewer participation and highlights structural inequalities. This thesis contributes to understanding photography but

more specifically the unseen and absence within it that makes us question things that there aren't always answers for.

Within this Thesis I explore the visual and theoretical examples of absence within photography and its powerful existence throughout the development of imagery and its time.

“What is not visible in the photograph is often the very condition of its production” (Azoulay, 2008). This quote challenges the characteristics of contemporary photography as it forces the audience to relate to the absence within imagery something intentional, like a clue or direction or reference to the hidden forces that lie behind the image.

This quote is great to start off our journey through discovering the absence and the unseen within photography as we are confronted with this quote describing how space and the unknown is not something that is forgotten about and disregarded but something that acts as an area to focus on and fill in around what has already been visually provided.

Absence and the unseen exist within every image, from every corner and border of a print or viewfinder, there is never a way to truly capture

something without missing or not including the things that are outside of the box. I will be using some example photography to reference and focus on the different aspects of this thesis, I will include the works of Louis Daguerre, Robert Capa, Daido Moriyama, Vilem Flusser, Weegee, Kevin Carter as well as some imagery from my own photography practice.

Chapter 1: Framing the Unseen

There are many alternative varieties of interpretating something that might remain unseen within photography. As previously mentioned,

even a more basic and physical concept such as not having the space outside of an image or photograph be present and there to further explain and understand the world beyond the photographer's lens and the camera's process.

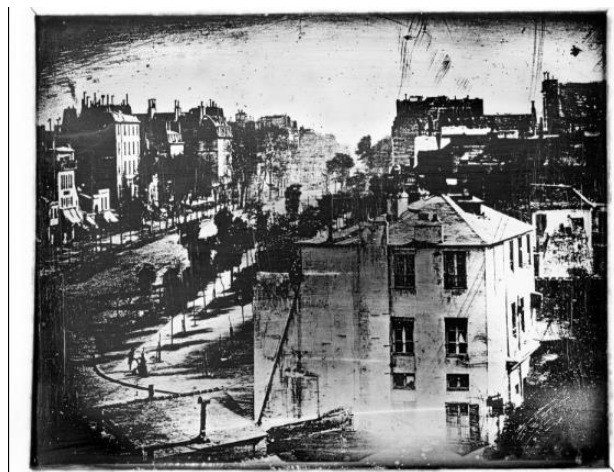
“The photograph is never anything but an image; it is a very subtle, momentary reality... but beyond its frame there extends a kind of blind field in which I imagine what is beyond” (Barthes, 1980)

This quote by Roland Barthes supports that within photography there is an area that gives the viewer enough information to process a subject or matter while also allowing enough space for creative thinking to fill in the blank areas that aren't visible. He quotes it as a “blind field” which suggests that it is something that people think independently and uniquely about regarding their own experiences and imagination.

Here is an image by Louis Daguerre called Boulevard Du Temple, this image is one of the earliest surviving photographs and one of the first photographs to capture a human being. The long exposure times of this image should alone make it nearly enough impossible to spot anyone

on a regular day however the man at the bottom left frame of the image is shining another person's shoes and because they didn't move for so long they came out processed in the final image as opposed to being invisible like the hundreds and hundreds of people would have been that day walking and travelling along the roads.

Figure 1:



Here are two examples of the unseen within photography, the obvious one being the ability to see the two figures in the bottom left of the image that appear to have had the spotlight within this long exposure, the art of long exposures also hides everyone else that moved

throughout the shot erasing the time and interactions from throughout the day.

The second and most valuable example being time as an artifact and the power to hold an image by such chance that was taken by such chance and lasted through all sorts of periods through history to be viewed by someone like me just by possibility. These two factors significantly make this image and moment something that couldn't be replicated to the same degree ever again, confirming absence and time where life was not documented and depicted or captured in such a way as today.

A quote that solidifies this idea is “What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once” (Barthes, 1980). This reinforces the argument that time is an important factor of photography and documentation, it also suggests that no moment of time can be replicated again, even if the scenario was set out and attempted to be replicated the exact same way, that moment in time could never be depicted with the same context or in the same frame of time ever again, making every image and piece of art a 1 of 1.

This is the exact same when it comes to any form of artistic expression, never will anyone be able to recreate the same depiction and piece of artwork, everyone has their own force of nature and creative interpretation engraving it in our nature and individuality to have independent methods and ways of thinking and expressing ourselves using visual information and symbolism.

This image alone represents absence just as much as presence, so it does allow room to argue that it does exist different examples of photography and that it is even sometimes used in very powerful ways that make an image great and something completely different to look and think beyond.

This is also supported by Barthes as he quotes “The photograph does not call up the past. What it establishes is the having-been-there; and in every photograph this having-been-there is also a kind of absence” (Barthes, 1980) suggesting that imagery and photography affirm presence just as much as it confirms absence.

Both factors utilise or in some ways or another are affected by time, and this is something that I believe is a very strong factor in relation to

absence and the unseen throughout photography and can be a more dominating field in many examples of imagery.

Photography is a powerful visual tool itself but it cannot depict the whole world and the experiences within it through a single image, but this is something that drives people towards photographs and the existence of things being captured and symbolised in mass over time for people to interpret and see for themselves through time and our ability to continually document and record our experiences.

As viewers we don't get the full experience of an event or a moment through a photograph, we don't even get a similar visual experience replicated to us, we get a frozen moment in time that we can only independently judge and feel, the rest of the context or outer image is left to us to fill out and make up for ourselves.

“Every photograph is the result of a decision by the photographer to select a single situation from the totality of all possible situations”

(Flusser, 1983)

This quote from Vilem Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983) argues that as the position as a photographer you must be actively aware that you are only limited to taking photos of slices of what you experience while you exclude the rest of the world.

This is a very important aspect of photography as it explains how imagery will always challenge the outer thinking of the representation or subject just as much as it depicts and highlights something.

Vilem Flusser's argument that Photography and the capacity / limit of what we can capture, and express is defined to the camera itself and its technological capabilities that push our potential and levels of being able to express ourselves.

He quotes this in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1984) as he discusses the cameras' technical ability and how it produces a coded variation / outcome of what the photographer inputs out of the many possibilities. "The possibilities contained within the camera program determine what the photographer can and cannot photograph" (Flusser, 1983).

This quote references the camera and the technologies within it being the definition and limit of what we can capture and our capabilities of representing absence. Daido Moriyama Captures the human scale of absence within his documentary street photography while Alberto Panizza captures absence in the macro scale. These two photographers are prime examples of technology operating to capture absence within time and our ever-constant change.

imagery does not have to be about quality and focus but more how well the camera is used to convey the message of the photographer.

An example of a photographer that disproves this point of view is Daido Moriyama and his documentary street photography. In this case Daido Moriyama utilised his film camera to convey his messages and representations of his community and the wide spectrums of expression and life within his powerful, high contrast imagery.

Figure 2:



The style of gritty, raw, high contrast photography works exceedingly well in utilising shape, light, framing, positioning to exaggerate certain aspects of the image and this is something that was done by choice, feeling, emotion and intention. These decisions and choices are what gives images such as this one a sense of life and human interaction, it almost recreates that fragile moment that is being depicted and it allows you to feel the bond the photographer feels as he senses the warmth of the sun and the faint snarl of the dog.

This links back to Susan Sontag and her idea around "Pseudo-presence" and its existence within imagery. She states that photos simulate immediacy and closeness. Given my last description of the image and how I personally feel the warmth of the sun and the highlights of the light etc I can feel the pseudo-presence of the dog and the photographer's vision despite not ever experiencing that moment or being the one behind the camera.

This is a perfect example to utilise something like this that is unseen within photography yet plays a large role in helping viewers initially identify with the photography or the aspects / subjects within it.

This example of work believes me to think that absence and the unseen is not captured through technology alone and that it is not the underlying factor that defines how the unseen is represented in the many ways throughout imagery. Although the discovery and invention of image making and developing pays a huge contribution to that factor, it is us as people that choose to go to the certain extremities just to capture what is close to us.

Cameras are built for the purpose to capture certain information and moments in time and without the inspiration behind the technology there would be no intention for the unseen to be represented and nothing to create or discover and we wouldn't be as exposed and as understanding of the world as we are now if we didn't pursue the feeling and intention to utilise imagery the way we have.

On the opposite side of the coin, Flusser's argument that technology and the cameras capabilities determine what remains unseen or absent could also be agreed as being true, and you could use this in many examples where technology has revealed the unseen. Technology is what allows photographers to accomplish certain goals such as building a camera and lens that can capture planets or searching

foreign countries to capture microscopic insect's invisible to the naked eye.

These are both examples of how the unseen has evolved and emerged because of technology and how photography is able to capture the things that we wouldn't be able to ever see with the naked eye, if it wasn't for the advancements in photographic technology, as it brings the invisible world to life.

An example from my own portfolio and photographic practice demonstrates how technological advancements have enabled me to present absence and the unseen through photography.

Figure 3:



Thanks to the rapid advancement of camera technology, I as a photographer, have been able to capture images using features such as higher shutter speeds, image stabilization, and other advanced functions. These technological capabilities allow me to document moments and details that would otherwise be invisible to the naked eye, effectively revealing absence within time. Techniques such as panning shots, employed in conjunction with these technological tools, enable the capture of subjects and movements that might otherwise remain unseen or lost in the passage of time.

Roland Barthes explains how the photographs themselves are evidence of the subject being absent. This concept gives images more of a value as they start to be considered differently when the experience itself is considered, documented and valued more than the outcome of the camera itself.

“What I see has been” (Barthes, 1980), this quote by Roland Barthes provides us with the context that photos are more than just paper, ink and a process of binding, they are all representations of something that someone felt closely about for a moment, whether that be something

random that a photographer may find beauty within, whether it's a piece of landscape / architecture, whether its people, communities and our ability to interact with each other and the world etc.

Vilem Flusser recognizes the impact of the camera and its ability to let us see the world we don't experience. "Photographs are attempts to render the world conceivable, to make the absent world imaginable" Flusser (1983).

This quote allows me to relate towards my next example piece of work which is the macro photography of Alberto Ghizzi Panizza.

Figure 4:



Alberto is a photographer that specialises in capturing the miniature world and scaling it up by extreme amounts, making the super small super large. This drastic change in proportion, made possible by the camera, allows viewers to see the details and textures within the eyes of an insect. This photography opens your mind to whole new realities

and understandings of the universe and what it has to offer from the many sizes and scales that it can be appreciated from.

This is a physical definition of capturing the unseen. Utilising technology as well as the subjects themselves that remain unseen and allowing people to see such detail and beauty that is missing within everyday life passing under our noses and changing around us.

“Technical images create a new kind of universe, one that rests upon an absent meaning, a void they themselves attempt to fill” (Flusser, 1983) Vilem Flusser sees imagery as something that is constantly hanging over the surface of the unseen and undiscoverable, hovering over the void of significance that photographers spend their time compensating for.

Photography represents what someone else has experienced and that is one of the main functions of a camera to serve as the creative eye of the photographer, however as mentioned previously despite photography being a tool that shows us something, it also reveals that it misses out and hides a lot more information behind it, so as viewers it is difficult to understand some examples of the experience and life behind

images without having more information or a wider context to work with.

Chapter 2: The photograph as evidence

The photograph as evidence reveals how imagery often acts as evidence to support the experiences and information that we have.

Why is it important for us to preserve our experiences and time through photography and symbolism?

It is because we love to collect information, learn and visually stimulate ourselves, however photography can only capture and reflect a tiny

fraction of the subject to support history or evidence of a singular moment in time.

“Photography is about remembering and forgetting; it preserves what would otherwise disappear from memory” (Batchen , 1997) Here Batchen claims that photography is something that takes a moment from our time that we cannot later forget. This tells us that photography works as a professional and authentic way to document the general experiences and sciences of life. Another quote to back this statement up would be that of Susan Sontag where she states that photography is a tool and a way that we now recognize factual records such as passports and licenses.

John Berger argues in *Understanding a Photograph* (2013) that photographs show a thin slice of time leaving the before and after permanently unseen, photographs provoke questions about them precisely because of what they are missing rather than the subject that they include.

This suggests that photographs aren't made to entirely be understood and appreciated but more so to provoke questions, to think about

topics that are challenging; while visualising topics and symbolism helps people face and answer certain questions or subjects.

Vilem Flusser argues that “Images signify the world. They are meant to represent it, to make it present despite its absence” (Flusser, 1983).

This is something that makes photography an international language just like music, something that everyone can hear using their ears or read and translate with the eye.

As humans it is in our nature to yearn and to seek for what we don't know or understand, because it satisfies and relieves us to believe we have some knowledge or answer to the things we don't understand or comprehend.

“The important thing is not to stop questioning” (Einstien , 1955)

Photography allows us to create something visual; it represents an experience and a reflection of a moment in time, it captures and holds those moments of time not only for the photographers but others, it works like information that people can gain existence from where there was once absence.

Within her research Susan Sontag explores the foundations of imagery and how images transition between being experiences in the present, to memories in the past, within the click of the shutter. She tries to find the hidden values behind what gives images the properties to hold emotion and undiscovered pain through the presence and time of the image.

“A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence”

(Sontag , 1977).

By this quote Susan is relating to the invisible powers that images can hold and restrain us with, she refers to the photo as something that creates a double effect, as it ‘imitates’ (in the word “pseudo”) presence but is simultaneously evidence for the absent. Sontag views images as having a distance and a path, that directly flows back to its origin and the throughout all its past.

Susan also looks at absence in the abstract such as people within photographs having changed or been pronounced as deceased while considering people and the time between the image in a way that

reflects the change of relationships and connections. This is an ideology that refers to the basics of symbology, storytelling and our primal, human instincts.

For centuries we have experienced and documented and replicated and visualised, exaggerated, abstracted, perfected all sorts of symbology and imagery to reflect and learn from our own and other peoples' experiences and journeys throughout time.

Our ability to read and analyse shapes, symbols and colour has been utilised, expressed and advanced since the start of our time as neanderthals using natural dyes to create cave paintings about hunting animals, chiselling the walls of pyramids to visualise the ancient stories of the bloodlines and gods that once symbolised the world for many.

The stories and the experiences of the unseen have been documented increasingly as time has passed, and we have only got more efficient at doing it. Sontag explains how this invisible value and wealth around imagery can be very important especially to someone that values time and presence as something that connects them emotionally and

spiritually to a time that once was or to people that once was present around them and their space.

“What you see is what you see; nothing more. Meaning is where you are. There is no hidden significance, no inner meaning” (Berger, 1984).

This quote implies that what we will see and feel throughout analyzing photography and symbology is exactly what we will want to see. Before we even look at the work and the image, we are already pre-determining what we will be wanting to think and feel before we open to understand what it is truly about.

This concept makes sense, especially considering our nature as humans to block out what we don't want to think or feel, this obviously has its moments where we allow ourselves to determine the destiny of something based on our prior / exiting thoughts, feelings and mentality.

Here is an example of work which links to an alternative aspect of the unseen and absence within photography, The Fallen Soldier by Robert Capa:

Figure 5:



This image represents the unseen through the moment of time and the experience itself. War photography is often a controversial topic for some viewers because of the nature of what is being depicted to people who may have never experienced a moment in time that they couldn't comprehend or want to visually experience any further.

This however makes it a crucial element within representing the unseen and creating existence where there is a mass amount of absence and lack of visual language / imagery.

This image specifically holds its own controversy as many prove to claim that it isn't an authentic image of a soldier being hit by a bullet and having his photo taken, and that it was in fact staged in an area / on a day of no reported conflict or war. There are many viewpoints and angles to this image however the argument remains that the absence in the experience itself and that true moment of time being missing makes the narrative of an image change and shift over time.

In *Burning with Desire* (1997) Geoffrey Batchen observes images as a form of loss, absence and memory rather than it merely showing what is visible. This links similarly to Susan Sontag and her ideology around absence and the unseen and how it makes her reflect more on what is lost and what has passed and changed rather than what is in front of her to evaluate now in the moment viewing it.

Geoffrey Batchen looks at the aspect of photography, throughout the periods and sections of time and throughout the moments where it was

effective as well as where it could have been used to crucially preserve a culture or a community and their history or their journey before being destroyed or forgotten about.

This topic on photography and the ability of documenting the unseen as time itself makes us reflect on the, what hasn't, and what could have been?

This element is even harder for us to understand the concept of considering the mass of time and life that wasn't documented or shared at all. Civilisations and communities that have survived and thrived throughout the different stages and segments of our existence that have been visually lost and misinterpreted over time due to the lack in technology through photography.

This still didn't stop us as a race from defining our cultures and beliefs through forms of expression such as art, architecture and symbolism to preserve our former identities throughout time as an artifact or token of experience.

Chapter 3: Absent politics

In this chapter I want to cover the unseen and absence within photography through politics and the camera as a political weapon.

Photography has been utilised politically in many ways; one example is the photographer Weegee who documented crime scenes in the 1930-40's. His work as a photographer, getting to crime scenes before the police, allowed him to get a politically motivated body of work that focuses on the violence within his life and the lack of enforcement and protection around the community.

Politics are everywhere and photography is a visual tool that can represent politics and ideas from a certain person or group. Allan Sekula argues that photography serves economic and bureaucratic institutions, she argues how image making has served properties of surveillance, policing, labour management and general administrative control, she argues that this is represented around us within, mugshots,

passport photos, licenses, documents etc. She studies how photography not only proves the existence and being of something but also the control and the power that imagery consecutively builds up throughout our lives constricting us even further within this visual and symbolic way. *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008).

Here is an image from Weegee, crime scene photo:

Figure 6:



This image shows a forgotten time and a reflection of how life and our communities have changed over the duration of time. His skill and dedication to his imagery make visible the human consequences of crime and violence, not only that but the lack of support and care from the law / government as they are depicted to be stood conversing as the body is lay covered on the cold pavement and while his blood spills over street kerb.

“To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world which feels like knowledge—and therefore power” (Sontag ,1977). This quote by Susan Sontag summarises the political dimension of making the unseen realities visible to the wider audience.

I believe that there is some level of responsibility to taking images in terms of what the photographer's choice and intentions are behind the camera, there is an even higher degree of responsibility to take imagery of political or war photography as you are considering peoples destiny and experiences of life which we constantly try to avoid due to

our nature of being afraid of death due to it having no answer or known reality.

This photo is a sharp depiction of reality and the politics that are wired and programmed for people to adhere to and live among, this image tells us a lot about the political narratives of this time period and it is a very powerful documentary image that covers what would likely have had a lid put on it and later forgotten through history. This photograph allows people to witness the unseen through the same political eye of the photographer, and it gives people a common opportunity to see the world as others do. In *Photographs Objects Histories* (2004) by Elizabeth Edwards she writes about the photograph being a transition from a moment in time to a physical tangible object that we can feel, bend and tear. She focuses on the transition itself as a process as well as what it means when we take a moment and experience and convert it into a product and what that represents to both photographer and viewer.

Another example of political absence within photography is the famous image of the vulture and the girl by Kevin Carter. This image is very powerful, and it is difficult to fully understand the concept of the image due to the fragility of the topic and the subject.

“The photograph is a document of social relations: it shows not only what is present, but also what is excluded, marginalized, or rendered invisible by power” (Azouley, 2008) This perfectly paired quote by Ariella Azouley from civic photography and political presence (2008) argues that absence within photography becomes a way of being able to understand political inequality and civic erasure on all of the different scales.

Figure 7



Photography can be used in very powerful ways to reflect a moment in time and this is an example of how absence in a powerful tool within photography that can shock us as viewers as we open our eyes to the political narratives that affect us as people and as communities. As photographers we hold a great deal of responsibility in representing the things that matter to us as well as doing it in the correct manor.

Political photography can be much finer to approach, and it often feels harder to define compared to other types of imagery as the concept is always open to interpretation while it also often effects the viewer mentally as they are suddenly faced with the unseen pain and misery that individuals and parts of the unseen world suffer.

Sontag also questions us as the audience and viewer to question who we are to get to briefly experience this moment / time of endured pain and suffering and what should work like this make us do / feel?

As mentioned, this work is important as it highlights the aspects of the visual world that positions in power can turn a blind eye and cover for the rest world. Through discovery, intention and time photographers

have captured political incorrectness and mistreatment through many different examples of imagery and symbolism.

“As objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself more numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible” (Sontag, 1997).

This quote refers to imagery of unseen violence and political poisoning making us numb as people and more susceptible to allowing further degrees of mistreatment and imbalance.

This quote also refers towards acknowledging the existence of the irreparable and unforgivable, this is a very passionate and strong way of interpreting something and choosing to face it through imagery and what the context of the image holds.

This links back to the quote by Roland Barthes in which he stated,

“What I see has been” (Barthes, 1980) This quote refers to the

experience and moment in time within itself and the importance of the

situation existing or not is besides the fact. This brings me to believe

that photography can represent the unseen aspects of politics even

without intentionally approaching and identifying something.

The unseen politics that lie behind photography essentially do just as

much good as they bring harm, viewers of the work are also prone in

struggling to accept or delaying to understand the wider experiences

that people have globally on a daily basis such as suffering, starvation

and violence, that originally stemmed and are left by the world's

economic and political problems / decisions.

The next quote by Ariella Azoulay is from her book *the civil contract of*

photography (2008) which discusses her ideas around photography

and the morals around what is considered acceptable. This brings me

to focus on the same aspects of photography such as narrative change,

the photographers' mindset during the depiction of violence and war,

as well as how people as viewers treat such media and what kind of

weight is entrusted in the photographer and viewer physically and mentally.

“Here, in this situation, what matters is simply to press the camera shutter and not relent, to take as many photographs as possible, to record, and to not allow this picture to be erased” (Azoulay, 2008)

This quote especially highlights the presence of the photographer and the mind when considering the unseen and absence through war photography such as experiencing and capturing the different types and scales of violence and suffering and what it bears as the person looking beyond it and making it a moment that is frozen forever for more unexposed people to witness.

“Photography is not merely the product of an encounter between a photographer and a photographed subject; it is also the product of an encounter between the photographed persons and the spectator who is called upon to watch” (Azoulay, 2008) This quote, directly references the audience / viewer as it engages them to think about their distance and relation to the what they are seeing in the photo and what they experience themselves in comparison.

Conclusion:

Photography holds immense power as a visual medium and platform for expression, placing responsibility on the photographer to decide what is shown and what is left unseen. The unseen is not an unsuccessful element within photography but a defining strength, prompting viewers to question what lies more than beyond the frame. Photography communicates not only through what it reveals but also through its deliberate in obscurities and faults, encouraging reflection,

memory, and interpretation. Absence appears in many forms whether through the infinitely developing advanced technologies that expose invisible worlds or through flawed or degraded film that emphasises life within decay and loss. Any photograph signals that a moment existed and was experienced by a person's eye long enough to be captured, allowing viewers access to fragments of reality otherwise inaccessible or lost to the abys.

This research draws on theorists such as John Tagg, who argues that institutions filter what may be seen, and Susan Sontag, who suggests that photographs both reveal and numb both photographer and viewer, shaping our responses to the examples of violence and suffering.

Together, these ideas highlight how absence is structured not only by aesthetics and symbolism but by power and position.

Photography therefore becomes both remembrance and warning, proving that absence can hold as much weight as presence. Through the unseen, the viewer becomes more than a passive observer, participating in a framework of political and ethical relations and decision making. As Azoulay states, "viewing is a civic skill," (2008) reminding us that spectators carry responsibilities in how they interpret

images also, emphasizing the importance of the viewers assumptions and conclusions to what is depicted.

Despite these viewers and photographers do not share the same burden and weight. The viewer may interpret freely, while the photographer carries the weight of exposing suffering to those far removed from it. Sontag's claim that "no 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain" (2003) reinforces that reactions to the unseen are shaped by global power structures, wealth, and lived experience.

"The photograph is never a neutral or transparent representation. It is a product of power" (Tagg,1988). Here in John Tagg's words he depicts the act of taking a photo as an act of power itself stating something and acting upon it. Within this quote he suggests that the decision and intention behind producing imagery. "Product of power" (Tagg, 1988) is referring towards photography existing as something that is controlled by the institutionalised, explaining that power ultimately decides what is visible to us.

Across technology, politics, and practice, this study concludes that there is no single method or approach to capture the unseen. Every photograph contains absence, and it is through this shared fragment of time that meaning is exchanged between photographer and viewer.

These studies have proven that the unseen can be captured, represented and depicted within the many forms and areas of its existence however there is no single true method or approach in doing this, and in fact every version and topic of photography covers the absence that exists through space around us and the photographer and viewer are the only subjects who share and trade that reflection / shard of time.

References:

Azoulay, A. (2008) *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Zone Books.

Barthes, R. (1980) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Batchen, G. (1997) *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Berger, J. (1984) *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

Berger, J. (2013) *Understanding a Photograph*. London: Penguin.

Capa, R. (1936) *The Falling Soldier (Death of a Loyalist Militiaman)*. Photograph.

Carter, K. (1993) *Starving Child and Vulture*. Photograph. Originally published in *The New York Times*, 26 March 1993.

Daguerre, L. (1838) *Boulevard du Temple*. Daguerreotype.

Einstein, A. (1955) 'Old man's advice to youth: "Never lose a holy curiosity"', *LIFE Magazine*, 2 May, p. 64.

Flusser, V. (1983) *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*. Göttingen: European Photography.

Flusser, V. (1984) *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*. London: Reaktion Books.

Moriyama, D. (Various dates) Street photography works. Man, and Dog, 1971

Panizza, A.G. (Various dates) Macro photography artworks. Photographs.

Sontag, S. (1977) *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Tagg, J. (1988) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Sekula, A. (1986) 'The body and the archive'

Weegee (Arthur Fellig) (1930s–1940s) Crime scene photographs.

Bibliography:

Carter, Kevin (1993) *The Vulture and the Little Girl (The Struggling Girl)*. Sudan. Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph documenting famine and raising ethical debates.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vulture_and_the_Little_Girl

Capa, Robert (1936) *The Falling Soldier (Death of a Loyalist Militiaman)*. Spanish Civil War.

A significant and controversial war photograph capturing the moment of a soldier's fall. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Falling_Soldier

Daguerre, Louis (1838) *Boulevard du Temple* [Daguerreotype]. Paris.

One of the earliest photographs, notable for capturing the first recorded human figure.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boulevard_du_Temple_\(photograph\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boulevard_du_Temple_(photograph))

Einstein, A. (1955) 'Old man's advice to youth: "Never lose a holy curiosity"', *LIFE Magazine*, 2 May, p. 64.

Moriyama, Daido (1960s–present) *Various works*.

High-contrast monochrome street photography exploring urban alienation and subjectivity. <https://aphelis.net/daido-moriyama-photographs/>

Panizza, Various dates. *Macro photography series* [Photographs].

Extreme macro imagery revealing biological details invisible to the naked eye. <https://albertoghizzipanizza.com/en/categorie-gallerie/macro-en/>

Into The Apex (Various dates). High-shutter-speed digital photography.

Used to demonstrate how technology enables the capture of unseen motion. https://www.instagram.com/harvey_shaw_/

Sekula, A. (1986) 'The Body and the Archive'.

Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Tagg, J. (1988) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Weegee (Arthur Fellig) (c.1935–1945) *Crime Scene Photographs*

[Various photographs]. New York.

Documentary images revealing urban crime, policing, and inequality.

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/new-york-city-by-weegee-the-famous/>